Engraving by Venturini (1685): view of the central zone of the Pathway of the Hundred Fountains. The terracotta high reliefs with scenes taken from Ovid's Metamorphoses are clearly visible.

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE GARDEN

Marc-Antoine Muret [14] wrote, « Hard labor never vanquished Hercules, nor sweet pleasure the chaste spirit of chaste Hippolytus. » So, for the sake of both these virtues (strength and chastity), Ippolito (d'Este) dedicated these gardens to Hercules and Hippolytus. The golden apples that Hercules stole from the sleeping dragon in the Garden of the Hesperides now belonged to Hippolytus-Ippolito, who, in remembrance, wanted these gardens to be consecrated to the donor (Hercules) [15].

Dedicatio hortorum Tiburtinorum
Nec labor Alciden fregit, nec blanda voluptas
Unquam animum casti molliti Hippolyti.
Ambarum nos hortos virtutum accensus amore,
Herculi et Hippolyto dedicat Hippolytus

Dedicatio hortorum Tiburtinorum
Aurea sopito rapuit quae mala Dracone
Alcides, eadem nunc tenet Hesperides.
Qui memor accepit, quos hic conservarat hortos
Auctori voluit munera esse sacra.

He died in Rome in 1585.

[14] Marc-Antoine Muret was born in Muret (Limoges) in 1526. In 1554, accused of immoral acts in Toulouse, he was condemned to be burned at the stake. But he managed to flee to Italy where he became a priest and devoted himself to teaching in various cities. A cultured Humanist, his discourses were highly appreciated for their elegant style and linguistic perfection. He wrote numerous commentaries on classical texts and several works directly in Latin, among which is the *Orationes, epistolae et poemata*. This work contains the two brief poems dedicated to the garden of the Villa d'Este which provided the key to interpreting the symbolism of the villa.

[15] The eleventh of the Twelve Labors that Eurystheus imposed on the Greek hero Hercules was the conquest of the golden apples given by Gea to Juno on occasion of her wedding to Jupiter. The golden apples were kept in a garden in a land of the Hyperborei (Mauritania) by the Hesperides, i.e. the nymphs of the west, namely Egle, Arethusa, and Hyperthusa, and by the hundred-headed dragon, Ladonis.